

1 Corinthians 14:26-40
Small group notes for the facilitator

Opener: What does “worship” mean to you? What kind of things do people worship?

The passage today is not just a summary of what Paul has been saying about tongues, it's also a summary of the last 5 chapters where, depending on your stance, he has been talking about worship or he's been talking about Church in general.

Read 1 Cor. 14:26-40

Q. How does Paul summarise the correct outworking of the gift of tongues in a worship service?

A. Paul's suggestion is quite orderly - two or three people at most; take it in turns; let someone interpret. If no one interprets then sit down and be quiet! That last part is hard to understand because how can you know if there's no one to interpret unless you stand up and speak? I suspect Paul's talking about serial offenders who do the same each week with no interpretation.

Q. Same question - this time about prophecy.

A. Again, just 2 or 3 people and to “weigh” what is said. v.30 is a bit confusing because it would appear that Paul is saying that if someone is in the middle of prophesying and someone else has something to say, rather than, “let them finish,” Paul says, “let the first be silent.” Maybe this is to stop someone going on and on and on....

Q. What does Paul mean by, “weigh what is said,” and, “spirits of prophets are subject to prophets?”

A. The former I would suggest is what John says is to, “test the spirits” (1 John 4:1) because not all *spoken as prophetic* comes from God. It can also mean to see how one should apply it to their own life. As for the latter statement, there's a couple of theories, one is that God will not force someone to prophecy against their will - the prophecy is subject to the willingness of the ‘prophet’. My suggestion is that Paul is saying that they're all prophets - Christians are prophets - they talk to God and listen for his response so I think it's more along the lines of “weigh what is said.” Support for this is in v37, “If anyone thinks he's a prophet or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord.” In other words, “weigh up what I'm saying to you as prophecy too.” However, he continues by saying that, “if you don't agree with it then you're not a real prophet” (v38)!!

Q. Look at the phrase, “as in all the churches of the saints,” in v33. Where does this best fit - with the first part of v33 or before v34?

A. Translators have to choose based on context as the Greek manuscripts are just a long string of Greek words with no punctuation or paragraphs. My thought is that it makes more sense to put all of v33 together (not because verse numbers are inspired, because they're not) just because then it saves the awkwardness of a skilled rhetorician like Paul using the word “churches” twice in one sentence. The ESV puts this phrase in a new paragraph with v34.

Depending on your choice, it either makes v34 a response to something specific that we don't know about that the Corinthian church is asking Paul, or it makes what Paul is going to say a command to all churches.

Q. We don't know if Paul is specifically addressing a question from the church but what do we know for a FACT that Paul is addressing and what else from this letter will help us understand Paul's point? (Note: In Greek ‘women’ is the same word as ‘wives’.)

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- A. Paul says that the women/wives should ask their men/husband at home. There is no way that Paul can be talking to women in general - he has to be talking about wives. There is nothing in Mosaic law about public worship services, nor is there anything about women keeping silent. Paul could be referring to Torah in general and created order. The wife is desiring to learn something. Paul has already said in 11:5, "WHEN women pray or prophesy..." We know from 16:19 that Prisca (a woman - Priscilla) is a church leader - it's unlikely that Paul is commanding women to remain silent yet approving Prisca as a (silent?!) leader.

Q. How should we best interpret these two verses (34-35)?

- A. Clearly the wife is trying to learn something from her husband. General understanding is that men and women were separated in church and that women were less learned than men. It's quite likely that the wife is calling out to her husband as he is prophesying or as someone is teaching. This is shameful and embarrassing when the church service should be done decently and in order (v40) because God is a God of peace (v33).

Summarizing the last 5 chapters then, Paul ties love and worship together. One cannot worship God when one is totally focussed on glorifying oneself.

From Matthew 6 we know that we worship what we love (Jesus says you can't worship both God and money). From 1 John 4 we know that God IS love and from the whole of Scripture we know that we're made in the image of God. It should be a safe conclusion then that if we love God we will worship him and through our worship of him we are being transformed back to original image. Jesus also says in John 13 that people will know we are his disciples when we love one another. Worship, love and service therefore all go together.

Q. Do you agree?

Close: The challenge on Sunday was that far from church being our worship time, our whole lives are an act of worship. When you look back over this past week what aspects of your life do you not let God into and therefore they cannot be an act of worship?